



| NEAR EAST





The Middle East has experienced some positive trends towards democratization and human rights protection over the past year. In Qatar, citizens overwhelmingly approved in a referendum a new Constitution that is based on solid democratic principles. Last fall, Morocco concluded its most democratic elections ever, while Bahraini women went to the polls to vote in their first national election. The Sultan of Oman stated that universal suffrage will apply to all citizens 21 years of age and older for next year's national elections. Greater numbers of NGOs have been established throughout the Middle East, and several trade unions have pushed for better labor laws and the privatization of state-owned companies. In some parts of the region, Internet access is increasing, and citizens are beginning to shop freely for ideas in the world marketplace. In some areas, there is progress towards the development of additional Arabic media that would be broadcast widely as alternative information sources to Al-Jazeera. Heavy governmental control over media is slowly being eroded as globalization takes hold.

In the aggregate, these steps towards greater pluralism and respect for fundamental freedoms in Middle Eastern countries may demonstrate a long-term trend towards democratization and human rights protection. The overall status of human rights and democracy in the region, however, remains bleak. High population growth is out-pacing economic growth and job creation. Middle Eastern countries are largely absent from world markets. Many countries in the region still suffer from systemic denials of political freedom. Women cannot vote or be gainfully employed in some countries and some governments severely restrict free speech and the development of NGOs. This combination of economic and political stagnation will breed greater political instability, insecurity and poverty if not tempered. Education has also stagnated in the Middle East, leaving large numbers of illiterate adults, under-educated children, and a work force that lacks the education required to compete successfully in global markets. Many Middle Eastern citizens have also been radicalized by religious education at the expense of secular education in history, civics, economics, reading, writing, math and science. We look forward to the formation of a democratic government in Iraq that can serve as an example in the region.

*"...America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance ... America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment."*

President Bush  
State of the Union Speech  
January 29, 2002

The U.S. Government continues in its efforts to support greater pluralism, economic growth and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Middle East. The United States is currently sponsoring programs that strengthen the role of independent journalists and trade unions, increase respect for the rule of law, improve election administration processes, and promote a regional dialogue on democracy for members of NGOs and governments. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), announced in December 2002, is a State Department initiative funding assistance in three separate areas relevant to democracy and human rights advancement in the Middle East: (1) economic reform, business investment and private sector development; (2)

education; and, (3) development of civil society, good governance and transparency with increased political participation for men and women. The U.S. Government is also continuing long-standing educational and cultural exchanges with our Middle Eastern partners.

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## REPORTING FOR HUMANITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

While the world's media brought their real-time sound-bites to bear on the war in Iraq, Internews, through a grant from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), focused its attention on providing Arab journalists invaluable lessons in the role of accuracy, objectivity, and balance in reporting and local media. As part of its on-going series of training Middle-East journalists in responsible reporting, Internews sponsored a four-day workshop in Amman, Jordan, even while the war in Iraq was raging next door. Forty Jordanians, Palestinians, and Saudis -- nearly all women -- took part in the training, which consisted of several instructional sessions. Trainees engaged in the fundamentals of professional journalism, with strong emphasis on basic reporting, interviewing and reporting skills, as well as training in legal issues, critical analysis, freedom of expression, and ethics. Men and women collaborated. Veiled women worked alongside those not wearing veils. Trainees found mentors, and mentors discovered a real hunger for the skills behind responsible, fact-based journalism. This was an inspiring lesson in the kind of investment -- in time, resources, mentoring, and cultural sensitivity -- that can nurture vibrant, pluralistic, and open media in the region.



## ALGERIA

Algeria has a history of restricted freedom of expression, pervasive impunity, and a judicial system influenced by the executive — all of which contribute to human rights abuses. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Algeria addresses a wide range of critical issues, including support for fair and transparent elections, disappeared persons, rule of law and legal code reforms, respect for minority rights, and safeguards to press freedom in addition to women's issues. Outreach efforts include programs to enhance political inclusion, government action and responsibility, social integration of women, resolution of the disappeared, and bolstering civil society.

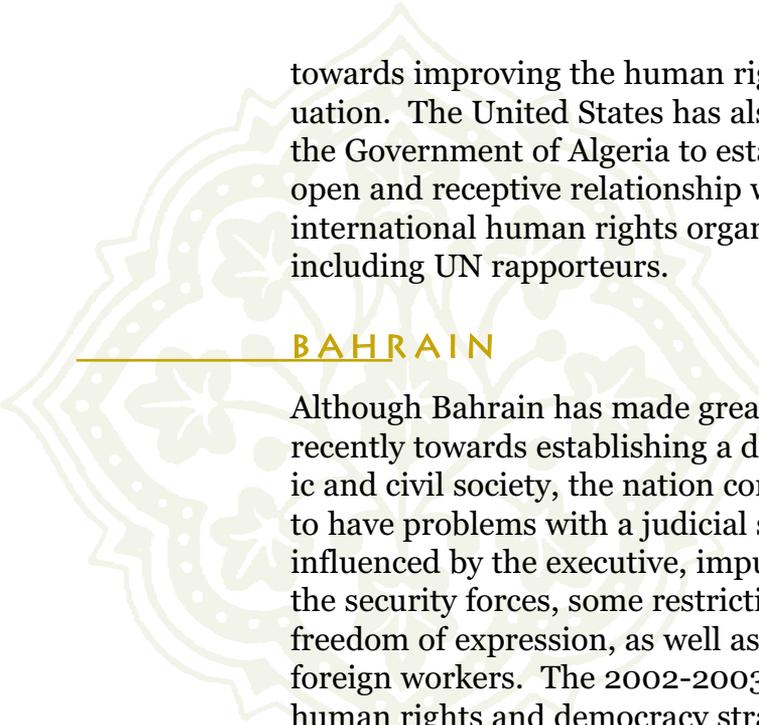
One of the greatest contributors to Algeria's human rights problems is the state of emergency that gives the government broad powers to curtail human rights for security purposes. The U.S. committed itself to maintain a constant human rights dialogue that emphasized the importance of a strong commitment to the rule of law and good governance. The U.S. also supported numerous programs with more than \$500,000 in funding during 2002 that provided practical education in human rights to judges, lawyers, mid-level military personnel, and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives. These funds also supported visits by Federal judges to assist in judicial reform.

The United States also worked to provide extensive and non-partisan technical support to the 2002 parliamentary and municipal elections. Related programs

under a \$800,000 grant to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) were aimed at increasing the responsiveness, effectiveness, and engagement of Algeria's political parties in the electoral process. NDI's programming supported election observation efforts and contributed towards making Algeria's elections free and fair. Election transparency significantly improved from the 1997 electoral period despite low voter turnout; transparency in turn boosted confidence in the process.

Strengthening the role of Algerian women in society is another U.S. priority. Embassy contacts with activist circles involved in women's issues increased, and several meetings and events were hosted by the Ambassador with the goal of bolstering the effectiveness of women's participation in political and civil society. Under the International Visitor Program, we also sent eight Algerians to the U.S. to gain first-hand experience in women's rights, transparent press operations, and the role of women in government.

Through the Embassy, we publicly supported the work and protection of individual human rights defenders in Algeria. The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials raised human rights related issues — especially the issue of the disappeared, restrictions on political participation and the press, the on-going human rights situation in the Berber-dominated Kabylie province, and the adoption of a new Penal Code — with the President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister. U.S. officials met with the National Consultative Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, as well as many NGOs, to gauge the Government of Algeria's progress



towards improving the human rights situation. The United States has also urged the Government of Algeria to establish an open and receptive relationship with international human rights organizations, including UN rapporteurs.

## BAHRAIN

Although Bahrain has made great strides recently towards establishing a democratic and civil society, the nation continues to have problems with a judicial system influenced by the executive, impunity of the security forces, some restrictions on freedom of expression, as well as abuse of foreign workers. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Bahrain focuses largely on the establishment of strong political institutions with democratic principles, including the participation of opposition parties and an increase in political participation, as well as the need for a law prohibiting trafficking in persons and more political intervention promoting societal tolerance between the Sunni and Shi'a communities. The U.S. embassy in Bahrain has initiated several projects to promote reform concerning these issues, including projects on political participation, increased assistance to new members of the Government, judicial reform, training for security forces, as well as prevention of trafficking in persons.

Bahrain held its first elections in nearly 30 years in 2002, inaugurating a program of political reform that has brought the country closer to establishing a democratic society. There is universal suffrage in Bahrain; however, the United States has supported efforts to ensure that citizens are actively participating in

the Government and making informed voting decisions. The U.S. funded a grant to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which organized workshops on women's issues, political participation, and organizational training. NDI also trained a local non-governmental organization (NGO) to monitor the elections, which were declared to have been free and fair upon completion. In addition, the U.S. has funded a program run by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) to establish a regional democracy and human rights resource center. Another project is providing training and assistance for newly elected legislators.

The United States has also been actively supporting judicial reform in Bahrain. We funded the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) to assess the judicial system and assist the Ministry of Justice's efforts to create a more modern and efficient judiciary.

Security forces have historically been permitted to abuse their authority without repercussions, but the United States is addressing this issue and working with the Government of Bahrain to reform the security forces to meet international standards. In anticipation of rioting at the Arab Summit this year, the U.S. sent an Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) team to Bahrain to assess the status of the security forces. The team provided suggestions on how best to train the security forces, including crowd/riot control, seminars for mid- and senior-level officials on operational planning and strategy, police leadership training, and less-than-lethal equipment acquisition and training.

Contingent upon funding being approved, these suggestions will be addressed in an effort to improve the methods of the security forces. In addition to this project, a human rights section has also been established within the Interior Ministry, which is currently drafting guidelines for the security forces in compliance with the UN's 10 international standards for police.

The United States has supported the participation of Bahrainis in International Visitor Programs that encourage political and economic reforms, including programs on trafficking in persons, freedom of the press, training for judges, enhanced economic freedom, and leadership roles for women.

The U.S. has consistently urged the Government to pass legislation prohibiting trafficking in persons. In response, the Government has created a national action strategy to combat the problem and has since begun to implement this strategy. Also, the Embassy established contact with the country's only NGO confronting the trafficking problem, and has set up discussions between this NGO and the government on the topic in order to formulate possible solutions.

## EGYPT

Egypt has a history of improper use of State Security Emergency Courts and military courts, torture, and restricted freedom of association, all of which contribute to human rights abuses. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Egypt addresses a wide range of critical issues, including support for a more robust civil society

and greater respect for human rights, worker rights, and religious freedom. The United States Embassy conducts intensive public diplomacy on respect for human rights and the need to strengthen democratic institutions.

The Emergency Law, which has been in effect since 1981 and was renewed for another three years in February 2003, continues to restrict many basic rights and is one of the greatest contributors to Egypt's human rights problems. The U.S. committed itself to maintain a constant human rights dialogue that lobbied intensively for the non-renewal of this Law and assurances of a liberal application of Egypt's new non-governmental organization (NGO) law. We also communicated our strong concern over the judicial process that led to the conviction of civil society activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim, who was ultimately fully exonerated by the Court of Cassation in March 2003.

The United States emphasizes the importance of a strong commitment to the rule of law, transparency, and good governance through its U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission. A six-year \$32.5 million grants supports strengthening the institutional capacity of local Egyptian NGOS in the areas of internal governance, sound financial management, and advocacy for citizens' interests and participation in civic action. This NGO Service Center is helping citizens to promote the rights of children and those with special needs, obtain documentation essential for voter registration, and help women become important and active members of society.

A separate five-year \$17.2 million project focuses on streamlining judicial processes and procedures in two pilot courts while promoting increased efficiency, transparency and accountability. The GOE is committed to replicating this process nationwide in all courts of first instance. The Collaboration for Community Level Services project represents a \$5.2 million experimental approach to local government reform aimed at overcoming the problem of over-centralized, non-participatory, and non-transparent government. The project focuses on strengthening the links between government, business, and civil society in order to increase participation, governance, public-private partnerships, and transparency in cooperating communities.

The Embassy's Public Affairs section has conducted a five-year \$500,000 civil justice project with the Prosecutor General's office. This program led to the adoption of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and the expanded use of "criminal writ". The project currently focuses on the adoption of plea-bargaining and the introduction of the concept of a public defender to the legal system. The Embassy has also funded numerous smaller projects through an interagency mechanism with grants totaling \$147,000 in 2002. These programs supported the participation of Egyptian NGOs in hearings on Egypt at the UN Commission against Torture in Geneva, a series of inter-faith children's television programs, a conference on the rights of the disabled, and a summer camp designed to introduce Egyptian youth to the concepts of democracy and civic responsibility.

In its support of religious freedom, the Embassy maintains formal contacts with the Office of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with leaders of Christian and Muslim religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. The Ambassador has made public statements supporting inter-faith understanding. The Embassy supports development of materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic and English. USAID funded an Egyptian version of Sesame Street, whose goals include promotion of tolerance, including among different religions. USAID is working with the Supreme Council of Antiquities to promote conservation of cultural antiquities, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish historical sites. USAID has also funded the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center office in Cairo, which played an active role in supporting worker rights, including training and anti-Child Labor programs.

The International Visitors program has focused on sending participants involved with human rights, good governance, civil society, and women's participation in politics to the U.S. This year two delegations will travel, with a total of 10 activists.

## IRAN

Iran has a history of summary executions, disappearances, widespread use of torture and other degrading treatment, reportedly including rape, restricted freedoms of speech, assembly, press, and expression. Women and religious and ethnic minorities also continue to face violence and discrimination. These and many other problems contribute to Iran's

extremely poor human rights record, which deteriorated substantially during 2002 despite ongoing efforts within society to make the Government more accountable for its practices. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Iran centers on requesting that our friends and allies demand concrete, verifiable, and sustained improvement in Iran's destructive policies in human rights and other areas before agreeing to upgrade trade and bilateral relations with Iran.

Although the United States does not maintain diplomatic relations with Iran, the U.S. effort to encourage the Iranian government to stop abusing its citizens' human rights is multi-faceted and ongoing. Additionally, Iran is currently ineligible for assistance from the U.S. Government pursuant to U.S. law. We continually urge other countries to condition their bilateral and trade relations with Iran on significant improvement in the areas of human rights, support for terrorism, obstruction of the Middle East peace process, and development of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, while making clear our objections to engagement with Iran, we are pushing the European Union (EU) hard to firmly link its implementation of a trade and cooperation agreement with Iran to positive changes in Iran's policies in these areas of concern.

The United States continues to push for resolutions criticizing Iran's human rights policies at the United Nations and other international fora. We have always supported and strongly lobbied for passage of the EU resolutions on Iranian human rights policies at the UN

Commission on Human Rights and at the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. U.S. Representatives regularly meet with members of various groups suffering human rights abuses in Iran. Their complaints are documented for dissemination to other governments and for inclusion in the annual Country Report on Human Rights for Iran and the Religious Freedom Report. The President and other U.S. officials have highlighted the poor treatment of the Iranian people by their Government on many occasions and will continue to do so.

Secretary Powell designated Iran as a "country of particular concern" for the fourth year in a row, in accordance with guidelines set out in the International Religious Freedom Act. State Department officials have worked with the Swiss Ambassador to Iran, whose embassy represents U.S. interests there, to raise religious freedom concerns about persecution of religious minorities, especially Baha'is.

## JORDAN

Jordan has a history of significant restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association, a weak judiciary, and impunity of its security services, all of which contribute to human rights abuses. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Jordan addresses a wide range of critical issues including fair and transparent elections, the rule of law and legal reforms, and labor issues. The United States seeks to promote these human rights issues through direct dialogue with the Jordanian Government, programs aimed at fostering elements of human rights, and reporting on human rights and the status of religious freedom in Jordan.

One of the greatest contributors to Jordan's human rights problems is numerous restrictions placed on citizens' ability to change their government. The U.S. maintained a constant dialogue that emphasized the importance of a strong commitment to the rule of law and good governance. USAID's \$4 million in programs during 2002 included efforts to improve the ability of Jordanians to influence public policy. Specific targets were E-government and judicial reform.

The Embassy's Public Diplomacy Section programmed funds in excess of \$100,000 for human rights-related programs. Ongoing judicial reform projects involve a visitors exchange program for judges and judicial experts and English-language training of Jordanian judges to broaden the range of information and contacts available to them. Similar efforts are underway for journalists and women's groups. Female political candidates also receive training and volunteers for their campaigns through USG programming. In the area of civic education, we supported the translation of a new textbook that the Ministry of Education plans to use in an upcoming pilot project in Jordanian schools. Finally, the U.S. sponsored a conference for civic education activists from a dozen Arab countries, including Jordan, who have founded "Arab Civitas" or non-governmental organizations aimed at strengthening civic education in schools and universities throughout the Arab world.

The U.S. maintains an ongoing dialogue with key actors in the labor sector including the labor union leaders, International Labor Organization officials, industrial park managers, factory owners, and gov-

ernment representatives. Our primary focus is working within the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) to encourage all parties to maintain acceptable labor standards for Jordan's growing textile industry. We note that in 2002, labor conditions in the QIZs were generally good and continue to improve.

The Government announced in late 2002 the creation of a new Human Rights Directorate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it is planning to train diplomats at U.S. institutions of higher education during 2003.

State Department officials in our Embassy and in Washington have raised individual religious freedom cases with the Government of Jordan at the highest levels. The State Department also sponsored a delegation of Jordanian Islamic scholars on a "Religion in the United States" program.

## KUWAIT

Kuwait has a history of a government-influenced judiciary, overcrowded prisons, and abuse of detainees by security forces and police. Women and foreigners continue to face violence and discrimination, especially in the judiciary, and the Government restricted freedoms of speech, assembly, association, and the press. Trade unions and workers rights continue to be highly restricted, and the Labor Law does not protect domestic workers. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy is multifaceted, with special emphasis on the continued denial of political rights to Kuwaiti women and worker's rights.

The disenfranchisement of women continues to restrict progress on improving many of their other basic rights and is one of the greatest contributors to Kuwait's human rights problems. The Embassy continues to pursue its diplomatic and public affairs engagements with members of the Government of Kuwait and the general public, seeking to clarify the positions of the various players and raise awareness of the benefit to the country of women's enfranchisement. In this respect, Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, are frequent attendees and speakers at evening gatherings in private homes that are open to members of all political orientations and classes (the "diwaniya" system). Other venues, such as women's groups and professional society meetings with academics, provide ample opportunities to promote awareness and understanding of U.S. values, especially women's rights. U.S. officials also regularly consult with leading women activists and high-level government officials to ensure that our support of the women's right issue continues in a manner appropriate to the Kuwaiti culture.

More than half of Kuwait's total population consists of foreign workers, including a large number of domestic servants and some child laborers who are especially vulnerable to abuse. While foreign workers were permitted to join unions under certain conditions, they were not permitted to vote or run for elective office in the unions. The United States consistently urges the Government of Kuwait to address worker rights, especially of foreigners, ban the employment of minors as camel jockeys, and continue to investigate reports and incidences of trafficking

in persons. We also encourage the Government to resolve the legal status of the 74,000 "bidoon" Arabs with residency ties but no documentation of their nationality.

The U.S. funded a \$559,000 project from its Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) to establish a regional training academy for non-government organizations on political participation, political party development, women's issues and media, which includes Kuwaiti participants. The United States Middle East Democracy Fund (MEDF) is sponsoring a program to train women activists working to develop and implement an effective strategy for obtaining political rights for women, including the right to vote and run for elected office.

The International Visitors program facilitated the participation of four Kuwaiti women in a regional program entitled "Women As Political Partners" during the fall of 2002. They traveled to the United States during our mid-term elections, and were able to observe grassroots political action, lobbying, and campaigning from a female perspective. The strongly outspoken Kuwaiti free press also continues to be supported by this program.



PHOTO: USAID/Thomas Hartwell

## LEBANON

Lebanon has a history of a government-influenced judiciary, overcrowded prisons, arbitrary arrest and detention of government critics, abuse of detainees by security forces and police, and restricted freedoms of assembly, religion, and association. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Lebanon centers on the strengthening civil society, the rule of law, and freedom of the press while combating trafficking in persons.

The lack of political and judicial transparency is one of the greatest contributors to Lebanon's human rights problems. The right of citizens to change their government remains significantly



PHOTO: USAID/Thomas Hartwell

restricted by the lack of complete government control over parts of the country, shortcomings in the electoral system, the flawed 2000 elections, and Syrian influence. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) addresses these issues through \$1 million in Transparency and Accountability Grants, \$6 million from the Democracy and Governance program, and \$200,000 in Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) funds that focus on strengthening local government, Parliament and oversight agencies by improving the delivery of services to citizens and municipalities. 544 municipal presidents, vice-presidents, and financial officers from 350 municipalities participated in 13 USAID-sponsored workshops to enhance their administrative and financial capabilities and better develop and train their human resources. USAID also provided 29 grants of up to \$25,000 to support the activities of local non-governmental organizations and other civic initiatives that targeted both the private and public sectors in the areas of health, government transactions, professional ethics, and youth awareness.

The Embassy utilized part of the Ambassador's Fund to support two programs designed to improve humanitarian conditions in Lebanese Palestinian refugee camps. One project focused on improving access for disabled children attending classes, while the second trained Palestinian women as nurses specializing in women's health issues.

The Embassy's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Working Group also made a concerted effort to impress upon the Government of Lebanon the need to

improve its TIP record. Several programs were devised to aid the government in this endeavor including the establishment of a safehouse for trafficking victims in Lebanon, funded by a \$330,000 grant from the Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs' Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP). Meetings between G/TIP and Government officials were also organized to promote TIP awareness and discuss strategies to counter trafficking, along with a roundtable with local media representatives.

The International Visitor Program brought a Lebanese immigration official, an academic, and lawyer from a non-governmental organization to the United States Government's Conference on Sex Trafficking in 2002. Another immigration official has been approved to participate in a TIP-related International Visitor program this summer. The Embassy also sent five Lebanese women to the United States to participate in a special International Visitor Program aimed at expanding women's participation in politics and political reform throughout the region.

The State Department funded the Institute of World Affairs, a Washington-based non-governmental organization (NGO), to run a successful three-year religious reconciliation project for Muslims and Maronite Christians in three villages in Lebanon. The project added a fourth village, has spun off a local NGO, and is being modeled for reconciliation efforts elsewhere in the Middle East.

## LIBYA

Libya has a history of summary executions; disappearances; arbitrary arrest and detention of persons, many of whom remain incommunicado; widespread use of torture and other degrading treatment; restricted freedoms of speech, assembly, press, and expression; and impunity. The Government controls the judiciary; citizens do not have the right to a fair public trial or to be represented by legal counsel; and the establishment of independent human rights organizations is prohibited. Women and religious and ethnic minorities also continue to face violence and discrimination. These and many other problems contribute to Libya's extremely poor human rights record. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Libya centers on concrete, verifiable, and sustained improvement in Libya's destructive policies.

Although U.S. ties to Libya are at the lowest level consistent with the existence of diplomatic relations, our efforts to encourage the Libyan government to stop abusing its citizens' human rights are multi-faceted and ongoing. Libya is ineligible for assistance from the U.S. Government (USG) pursuant to U.S. law.

The U.S. was key to focusing renewed and increased international attention on Libya's poor human rights record following the African Union's unanimous endorsement of Libya's nomination to chair the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) in July 2002. At that time, we began an active dialogue with other UNCHR members to oppose the nomination, citing Libya's poor human rights record and the fact that

Libya has yet to fulfill the relevant United Nations Security Council requirements related to the bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988. These requirements include accepting responsibility for the actions of its officials. In response to the resulting international pressure, in September 2002 the Libyan Government released 62 political prisoners and announced that it would no longer hold any political prisoners except those identified as belonging to al-Qaida. Also in September, Saif al-Islam, Qadhafi's son, acknowledged Libya's poor human rights record and appointed for the first time a Secretary for Human Rights. The effectiveness of this new ministry remains to be seen.

In January 2003 the United States took the unprecedented step of calling for a vote in the UNCHR and then voting against Libya's nomination as CHR chair. Although Libya ultimately won the vote, these U.S. efforts focused international attention on the unacceptability of Libya's chairmanship and ensured that future Libyan human rights violations would receive increased international scrutiny.

Representatives of the United States Government regularly met with members of various groups suffering from human rights abuses in Libya. Their complaints are documented for raising with other governments and for inclusion in the annual Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Libya and the International Religious Freedom Report.

## MOROCCO

Morocco has a history of arbitrary arrest and detention, and abuse of detainees, all of which contribute to human rights abuses. Overall, the Government generally respects the rights of its citizens in most areas. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Morocco and Western Sahara addresses a wide range of critical issues, including support for fair and transparent elections, rule of law reforms, and women's issues. Outreach efforts continue to target worker's rights, and child trafficking.

Morocco took positive steps towards a more democratic system, holding its first free and fair parliamentary elections in 2002. The United States remains committed to the continued development of democracy in Morocco and supports programs that emphasize the importance of a strong commitment to the rule of law and good governance. We provided over \$1 million to a consortium of American non-governmental organizations working with Moroccan non-governmental organization partners to train candidates and political parties, and also to strengthen transparency in the September parliamentary elections (primarily through the National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute). The Embassy's Democracy Working Group also programmed \$233,000 to support 12 projects that encouraged voter outreach and education and the training of women candidates.

Senior United States Government officials continue to meet with Moroccan parliamentarians and other government officials to encourage further political and

economic reform. In support of this approach, the U.S. funded the Maghreb Forum for Democratic Political Action in February 2003 as part of a \$559,000 grant to support the strengthening of political parties throughout the region. Non-governmental organization (NGO) participants from Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, and Tunisia discussed political party development and participation, media and women's rights.

U.S. officials regularly met with a range of human rights activists, non-governmental organizations, members of civil society, and Jewish and Berber community leaders to gauge the human rights environment in general, including the level of religious tolerance. The Embassy and Consulate General also promoted constant awareness of the issues of child labor and trafficking in persons through regular meetings with NGOs and government officials. The U.S. funded a project promoting civil-society capacity building for local development associations, local political party training, and women's legal rights training to help women's non-government organizations advocate more effectively for women's rights.

The United States also sponsored a highly successful \$300,000 American Bar Association/Freedom House program that assisted the Government in reforming the Moroccan Penal Procedure Code. A follow-on program has just begun to address remaining concerns in the Code. The U.S. Department of Labor signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Morocco to fund a \$1.5 million project promoting collective bargaining and the peaceful resolution of

labor/management disputes. In addition, the United States-Morocco Free Trade Agreement now being negotiated will also strengthen worker rights.

International Visitor Programs brought several members of Moroccan NGOs, as well as government officials and activists in the fields of children's rights and child trafficking, labor rights, prison reform, and women's rights, to the United States. Five women political activists participated in a special International Visitor Program designed to observe U.S. Congressional elections last November. The Embassy also sponsored the training of three Moroccan judicial experts in Cairo.



PHOTO: IFES

## OMAN

Oman has a history of arbitrary arrest and detention, including holding detainees incommunicado; prohibiting the activities of human rights organizations; and restricting freedoms of speech and association — all of which contribute to human rights abuses. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Oman addresses a wide range of critical issues, including support for fair and transparent elections, expansion of the right to privacy and individual freedoms for its citizens, and allowing human rights organizations to operate freely. Outreach efforts continue to target judicial reform, minority issues, and a free and responsible press.

One of the greatest contributors to Oman's human rights problems is the violation of citizens' individual freedoms and privacy rights. The U.S. remains committed to the continued expansion of these rights as evidenced by the Sultan's recent announcement of universal suffrage for this year's election. The Embassy hosted a website design specialist to provide practical training to non-governmental organization (NGO) staff on using the Internet for networking with other organizations; a particular emphasis was placed on NGOs that serve women and the disabled. Another speaker reinforced the message of religious tolerance and the importance of interfaith dialogue. The Embassy continues to work closely with journalists and editors through visits and collaborative activities to encourage free and responsible reporting. Journalists not only produce numerous articles on their experiences but also discuss the important role that Arabs and

Muslims living in the United States have in the editorial process. We also actively urge members of the press in Oman to discontinue the common practice of voluntary self-censorship.

The Parliamentary Strengthening Project, a two-year \$150,000 Middle East Democracy Fund-sponsored International Republican Institute initiative, focuses on a capacity-building program to train the staff of Oman's nascent parliament. The training is specifically designed to enhance the ability of staffers to propose legislation or to critique government proposed legislation. Democracy Small Grants Program funds also enabled civil society organizations to increase their outreach and advocacy work on women's issues and with the disabled.

A \$559,000 Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) project is funding a regional training academy for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on political participation, political party development, women's issues and media that includes Omani participants. Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner traveled to Oman in June 2002, and discussed human rights developments with a number of Omani officials, NGOs and others.

International Visitor and Embassy funds have implemented workshops in coordination with the International Development Law Organization, a Rome-based NGO. These workshops addressed the issue of judicial reform and featured international experts in the areas of arbitration, management of NGOs, prosecution of newly decreed crimes, cybercrime,

and counterterrorism. Over 500 Omani lawyers, legal officials, prosecutors, investigators, judges, police officials, academics, economic advisors, and NGO managers participated in the workshops, which received extensive media coverage.

## QATAR

Qatar is a country in transition from a traditional society with a history of severely restricted freedoms, including the freedom of assembly, association and religion, to a more democratic system of government that protects fundamental rights. Positive developments in the past year include approval of a Constitution that provides for parliamentary representation and protection of basic human rights; the election of a woman to the Central Municipal Council; and the creation of a Human Rights Commission that includes several women members. Serious problems still remain, however, including trafficking in persons and bias against foreign workers. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Qatar addresses a wide range of critical issues, including the establishment of democratic institutions, advancing the role of women, urging the Government of Qatar to address the issues of domestic and foreign workers' rights, and ending trafficking in persons.

The continued restriction of many basic rights has been one of the greatest contributors to Qatar's human rights problems. We expect this to improve as the new Constitution is implemented. The U.S. committed itself to maintain a constant human rights dialogue that has lobbied intensively for easing restrictions on workers' rights and continued

progress towards religious freedom. Senior U.S. officials, including the Ambassador and the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), have held productive meetings focusing on these issues with government officials and private leaders during the past year. The U.S. emphasizes the importance of a Muslim-Christian dialogue and regularizing the status of clergy in Qatar. The Embassy supported a Government-sponsored conference, "Building Bridges," promoting Muslim-Christian dialogue.

Collaborating with Government officials and private citizens, the Embassy contributed to the development of programs in the fields of election administration, training of women political candidates, and the development of civil society. The U.S. brought Deputy Governor of South Dakota Carol Hillard to speak on grassroots campaigning at a seminar on women in politics last Spring. A female former municipal candidate also traveled to the United States for a program on women in politics.

Qatar is also a regular participant in several regional initiatives. A \$559,000 Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) project is sponsoring a regional training academy for non-governmental organizations on political participation, political party development, women's issues and media. The HRDF is also sponsoring a regional program and training center in Bahrain to strengthen electoral administration systems in the Persian Gulf, and will work closely with Qatar on this project.

Significant efforts have been made to highlight the significance that the issue of trafficking persons has to the United States Government. We are specifically targeting the use of children brought to Qatar to serve as jockeys in the camel races, and have urged the adoption of age and weight standards for riders.

Government officials have agreed to allow a U.S.-funded team to provide consultation and training to instill better immigration controls on children entering the country.

A digital video conference hosted by the Ambassador highlighted the Arab Human Development Report, and hundreds of brochures explaining the history and concept of human rights were distributed along with the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and Trafficking in Persons Reports.

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## SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia has a history of suppression of religious freedom, restriction on freedom of expression, trafficking in persons, and other violations of human rights. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Saudi Arabia focuses on these concerns and builds upon quantifiable progress in 2002 in both trafficking and press freedom, with marginal improvement in religious freedom.

The U.S. encourages and promotes improvements in freedom of the press in a number of ways. During 2002, we brought five Saudi reporters to the U.S. on programs related to journalism. The Embassy has also continued a public

affairs outreach program to Saudi women leaders, including many journalists. We are also urging the Saudi Government to permit more foreign journalists to visit the country and to report on domestic Saudi issues and international political issues.

The United States is engaging the Government of Saudi Arabia regarding our concerns about religious freedom. We encourage full and consistent implementation of the Government's commitment to free private religious worship; raise cases with the Government where violations have occurred; and encourage the Government to discreetly permit non-Muslim clergy to visit Saudi Arabia to minister to their congregations. The Ambassador and other Embassy officers have repeatedly pressed the Government at senior levels to honor its commitment to the freedom of non-Muslims to worship privately, and to promote religious tolerance of all faith communities, including Shi'a Muslims and Christians, in its educational curricula, media, and mosque sermons. Embassy officers regularly meet with members of minority religious communities in order to follow their activities and monitor violations of their right to worship freely.

U.S. objectives with respect to trafficking in persons are threefold. We are encouraging the Saudi Arabian Government to inform incoming workers of their rights and recourse in response to abuse when they receive visas to travel to Saudi Arabia and upon arrival. We also urge the Government to promote public awareness on issues relating to domestic servants. Finally, we have discussed long-term means of improving the legal

rights of foreign laborers under Saudi labor law. Our Embassy has engaged Saudi officials, encouraged protection for foreign workers under the law, and worked with Saudi media and activists as means to promote U.S. goals. The Embassy is expanding its range of contacts who handle trafficking issues within the Government. We are also encouraging non-governmental organization (NGO) and private involvement and increasing public affairs efforts to highlight the dangers and vulnerabilities of trafficking in persons.

## SYRIA

Syria has a history of restricted freedom of expression, including severe constraints on civil society and anti-government demonstrations. As a State Sponsor of Terrorism, Syria is ineligible for U.S. economic assistance. Despite limited resources, the 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Syria is a multi-faceted approach, which includes bilateral discussions, public diplomacy programs, and outreach to expatriate human rights and civil society advocates.

U.S. officials regularly emphasize the importance of freedom of association, speech, and the press and of respect for human rights during meetings with their Syrian counterparts. The U.S. Embassy maintains a dialogue on these matters with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and participates in an inter-embassy human rights monitoring group that exchanges information and coordinates responses and programs. This coordination plays an essential role in promoting human rights in Syria.

In an effort to stimulate discussion about the full range of issues confronting our bilateral relationship, the Embassy helped organize and participated in the second round of the U.S./Syrian Dialogue in January 2003. This informal program provides a valuable forum for exchanging ideas and broadening communication between Syria and the U.S. on a number of issues, including respect for human rights.

The Embassy manages an active public diplomacy program that emphasizes the importance of democracy and human rights. For example, speaker programs encourage greater Syrian participation in public life and address topics such as how individuals can influence the political system, with an emphasis on transparency and civil society; ways that philanthropy can be used to improve society; and, the changing role of Arab and Muslim-American women in U.S. society.

The U.S. maintains an active International Visitor Program designed to expose “up-and-coming” Syrians to alternative viewpoints, professional training, American culture and society, and to encourage broader participation in civic society. This program also introduces participants to their American counterparts and exposes them to strategies through which new ideas and reform can be implemented.

## TUNISIA

Tunisia has a history of restricted freedom of expression, arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Tunisia includes a wide range of initiatives in promoting human rights and the further development of democracy and civil society. The strategy focuses on raising concerns with Tunisian officials at all levels, expanding contacts with the local human rights and civil society communities to identify critical human rights issues in the absence of a free press, and working with other countries and international activists to focus assistance and diplomatic pressure.

U.S. officials raise human rights concerns regularly with Tunisian government officials at all levels. The U.S. has also been engaged in a systematic effort to increase contacts with local and international activists and to share information about human rights abuses in Tunisia. Embassy officers meet bimonthly with their counterparts from European embassies to discuss pending human rights cases and trends, and to coordinate attendance at trials and information-gathering meetings with activists.

The Embassy hosted human rights activists at receptions and informal gatherings to provide opportunities for exchange of information without police harassment, as well as a roundtable for leaders of the opposition parties to hold discussions away from ruling party deputies.

The Embassy's small Democracy Fund provided assistance to academic and civil

society organizations for human rights/rule of law training, teaching, and advocacy. Approximately \$40,000 was awarded to several projects. This included a grant to the Faculty of Jurisprudence to start a core collection of Common Law titles in English, thereby supporting students studying for a degree in common law; a grant to the Arab Institute for Human Rights to cover the costs of publishing the proceedings of its annual conference; and an additional grant to the Arab Institute to translate the State Department's Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Tunisia into Arabic.

## THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

Continued violence and terrorism were major contributors to Israel's poor human rights record in the West Bank and Gaza during 2002. The Palestinian Authority also had a poor human rights record. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for the West Bank and Gaza centers on implementation of President Bush's two-state vision, the end of violence and the restart of a political process within Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

Support for civil society development in the West Bank and Gaza is a USG priority, and its flagship program, "Tamkeen", has been allocated more than \$32 million for 2000-2005. USAID programmed \$1,245,787 of these funds into 160 grants to key Palestinian organizations that promote reform and support an active role for citizens and civil society groups in oversight and advocacy roles. These organizations undertook polling and sur-



veying, promoted policy and legislative change, and organized grassroots fora to determine the needs and priorities of Palestinian citizens. Funding for related civil society strengthening programs has totaled more than \$4.3 million in the last seven years. USAID supported a series of workshops that examined and built models of other societies transitioning to democracy, focusing on the associated rule of law issues. USAID also provided more than \$1,000,000 in electoral assistance to a consortium of non-governmental organizations preparing the infrastructure for Palestinian general elections, which may take place as early as this year.

USG officials continue to encourage Palestinian legislators to assert their role in governmental reform. USAID-financed videoconferencing equipment permitted legislators separated by border closures to meet, an opportunity that was key to orchestrating the no-confidence vote that challenged the Palestinian Authority's (PA) executive to change the

cabinet's membership in 2002. Other programs targeting legislative strengthening are being supported with more than \$8 million in funding. Embassy officials also continue to emphasize the unacceptability of violence and demanded PA actions against terrorism within the West Bank and Gaza as well as Israel. In this respect, USAID awarded a total of \$500,000 in six grants and provided technical assistance to Palestinian NGOs for workshops, training, and dissemination of information on non-violent ways to resolve political disputes. The discussion of rule of law issues was supported by \$1,314,304 in USAID programs, which trained prosecutors and judges, advised courts on case management, supplied reference materials, and improved law school curriculums.

Public diplomacy programs seek to improve human rights awareness in the West Bank and Gaza among all citizens. The U.S. Consulate General has hosted numerous speakers on the topics of rule of law and democratization, as well as pro-

vided Arabic and English books on human rights and democracy to local schools, libraries and other contacts. Palestinians are also regular participants in the Salzburg Seminar, International Visitor, and Fulbright Summer Institute programs.

## YEMEN

Yemen has a history of problems in both the political and social sphere, including citizens' limited ability to change the government, a weak judiciary, human rights abuses, and laws limiting freedom of expression. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Yemen addresses the need for the Government to strengthen its human rights record, continue to enact social reforms, improve problems within the judiciary, and further the process of democratic development. The United States has initiated several projects addressing these issues, including programs aimed at expanding

Yemen's political parties, improving election administration, increasing voter participation, and improving the country's human rights record.

The Defense Department Counter-Terrorism Fellowship funds a training program for Yemeni military officers on the importance of respecting human rights. The result of this project has been a marked decrease in cases of human rights abuse by the military.

At the encouragement of the U.S., Yemen has enacted a long-term program of judicial reform, in an attempt to counter the numerous problems within the judiciary. The courts are only nominally independent and have been plagued by corruption, executive branch interference, and the failure of authorities to enforce rulings.

In addition to political reforms, the United States has been urging the Government of Yemen to enact social



PHOTO: USAID/Thomas Hartwell



PHOTO: USAID/Thomas Hartwell

reforms, encouraging respect for human rights as well as eliminating discrimination against Yemeni citizens, especially minorities. The Embassy's Public Diplomacy Office funded 17 separate projects in 2002, all of which have had ambitious aims in improving Yemeni society. One of the most notable was the program to train and educate ten influential religious leaders on political, civil, and constitutional rights guaranteed under Yemen's new Human Rights Law. Another of these was a program aimed at decreasing violence against women, in which leaders from local women's groups worked with officials from several ministries to raise awareness of the psychological, medical, criminal, cultural, and legal roots of violence against women. This program led to the creation of a national network of women's groups aiding victims of domestic violence. Yemeni women have traditionally been politically and socially marginalized, with little

female political participation, restricted access to healthcare and education, as well as widespread reports of domestic abuse, including female genital mutilation. Under a USDA program, the United States established a project to build and furnish new primary schools for girls in isolated rural areas in order to give girls access to modern education and to facilitate their inclusion within society.

Although the citizens of Yemen still have limited ability to change their Government, significant strides have been made to fix problems plaguing the electoral system, such as lack of voter participation as well as corruption within local political structures. The United States funded programs by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) to strengthen Yemen's multi-party system. They worked directly with political activists to improve future

elections by focusing on increasing women's political participation and overall voter registration, and improve local governance.

NDI also initiated a U.S.-funded program in which members of the local councils, very powerful and influential in Yemen's political tradition, were trained to decrease problems of patronage, corruption, and gender bias. As a result of both of these efforts, the April 2003 national parliamentary elections were generally considered to have been a significant improvement over previous elections, with good marks for organization, participation, and security. The Ambassador, embassy staffers, and election observers from IFES, NDI, the European Union and the UN were present at polling places throughout the country to observe the elections.

